

Los libros de arte y arquitectura de la Editorial Canosa

Art and architecture book edition moves at an excessive rhythm nowadays where editorial production has very little or no interest, an interest with immediate expiration date, between globalisation and multinational. They are books to consume without reading, to own and glance over, to page and have a look at without thinking about their contents, not because a lack of time but a double lack of interest, the one of the reader and the one of the book itself, because the paper quality, photo mechanics and the book binding are usually more than the text itself. On the other hand nowadays it is distressing to see the same books with limited titles in Rome, Paris, London, Barcelona or Madrid, in such a way that you must be an expert to go out from the induced circuits and try to find serious books that, inside this field, become more and more limited with time. The triumph of ephemeral, artful and mild things without any claim, going with the showy colour of its images, has finished with the intelligent book, and what is worse, with the figure of the editor. That one in the same way as the one of the bookseller should be declared protected species, so that the reader, whose activity, as Borges says is the most resigned, civil and intellectual, doesn't eventually disappear. If all of them are scarce in the general world of book, it is worse in the particular architecture field, where only the so called avant-garde architecture and its author

are promoted in a daring process of commercial interest with many derivations, forgetting history in a painful way. It is pure

and tough market, not much more. I can say with an evident nostalgia that many model initiatives, which have had very special editors and booksellers in the Spanish scene, stay behind; since Mister Pablo Gutiérrez Moreno, architect, until Miguel Ortiz, industrial engineer, who had certain romantic spirit but didn't ignore nor despised the unavoidable market rules. They had instinct and devoted themselves to their work admirably, they knew how to offer a series of plays and translations with personal risk and enthusiasm, but although they had an objective interest, they didn't fit the catalogues of the big publishing houses that were more worried about the success and immediate selling of the book. Something similar happened in the missing Canosa publishing house from Barcelona. It was a little family enterprise whose main protector was the architect Emilio Canosa Gutiérrez (1885-1971), born in La Habana but whose father, Ramón Canosa Cierto, was from Galicia. That one was a ship owner and a banker, and after the 98 Disaster, came back to Spain as many other Spaniards, settling in Barcelona with his family in 1902. In that city he studied architecture getting his degree in 1918. Emilio belonged to a large middle class family that he made sure to increase, because when he got married with Concepción de los Cuetos (1898-2000), from Laredo (Cantabria) they had many children. His granddaughter Silvia, who is also an architect, says about him that "he loved

sun clocks, was fan of family trees and photography, passionately fond of architecture, always attentive to his brothers, sons and grandsons, and was a very amusing and affectionate person who lived teaching and entertained himself learning." Emilio Canosa got into the publishing world a little time after finishing his degree, by 1920, incorporating his eight brothers with whom he created Canosa publishing house in 1926. They delivered their tasks wisely, the whole family took part in it; from photography, the connections with the writers, translations, the text composition, to the printing and binding, and all those tasks that were made in a craft way at that time (it is very symptomatic that the publishing house in their propaganda leaflets insisted on the fact that their books pages were hand made and precisely printed) From this first moment we must remark the character and reach of the first printed book, when the only publisher was Emilio Canosa, because it is a reflection of that publishing adventure. It deals with the translation and edition of the book by Kurt Hiescher *Das Unbekannte Spanien. Baukunst. Landschaft. Volksleben*, published in Berlin in 1922 and dedicated to the king Alfonso XIII, although a year before it had been published in Spanish and called *La España incógnita. Arquitectura, paisajes, vida popular* (The unknown Spain. Architecture, landscapes, popular life) published in Barcelona by Emilio Canosa. How could that Spanish edition that was published the same year [1921] as Espasa-Calpe published another one from Madrid, go ahead? It is a mystery, although the interest that the book must have awoken

in Emilio Canosa is clear, because it was an excellent collection of photographs that Hiescher had taken travelling around Spain between 1914 and 1918, where the real Spain appears in a mixture of sociologic, ethnographic and aesthetic values measured out. In another place I have written that those amazingly beautiful images that have cheered other publishers up to turn on them (Edilux, Granada, 1991; Agualarga, Madrid, 2000) anticipate themselves to the pictorial line that would be exploited afterwards by the engineer and photographer José Ortiz Echagüe, in his different books appeared since 1933. Although the Canosa publishing fund is really significant, we are not going to do a detailed study about it because it is not very long. It is enough to say that in 1926 when Emilio Canosa was professor in the University School of Architecture in Barcelona, the most well known work of the Austrian architect Camillo Sitte, *Construcción de ciudades según principios artísticos* (Building of cities according to artistic principles), came to life. It was an elegant edition that was translated from the fifth German one and added the drawings and perspectives that go with the well known French edition by Camillo Martin, besides have a preface in Spanish written by Sitte's son, who was also an architect. From 1928 Canosa publishing house probably reeled off with very different and ambitious plays like *Labras Heráldicas montańesas* (Heraldic mountain carvings), by Luys Santa Marina, *El hierro forjado español de los siglos XII al XVIII* (Spanish wrought iron from XII to XVIII centuries), by Quintana, and, above all, the Spanish edition of the well-known *Historia*

de la Arquitectura por el método comparado (History of Architecture by the compared method), by the English architect Sir Banister Fletcher (1866-1953). It was a very well known play, specially by the architecture students from Madrid and Barcelona who studied a little before and after Spanish civil war, because it is/was a model manual under a genuine Anglo-Saxon and a little botanic view, specially referring to all the old and medieval architecture. The success of the book go with it since the first edition that appeared in London in 1869, and was based on its clear concepts, the great number of drawings properly annotated, ground plans, sections, elevations, etc., which put a solid history of architecture within the reach of "students, artists, and fans" with a shorter series of photographs. The so called compared method by Fletcher, which Forrest Wilson questioned some years ago in his book *A history of architecture on the disparative methode, with apologies to Sir Banister Fletcher* (New York, 1974), didn't consist so much on comparing different history episodes but showing the characteristics of all of them in a parallel way. So he analysed what he called the "architectonic character" of the main examples, after explaining the geographical, geological, climatological, religious, social and historical influences under a certain determinist view such as Hipólito Taine did, and finally he deduced some specific characteristics as a conclusion that he calls "comparative analysis". Then an updated bibliography completed each chapter of that history.

Canosa publishing house wasn't limited to the mere English translation, which would have been important by itself. They also entrusted the Spanish part to the architect Andrés Calzada Echevarría with a missionary spirit towards Spain, when they saw that Fletcher ignored Spanish architecture very much, because it simply didn't exist for him, in spite of the fact that other English architects such as Street left so admirable works about our medieval architecture. Canosa must have known Calzada since they studied in the Architecture School in Barcelona because he had got his degree a year before than Canosa, and afterwards both of them devoted themselves to teaching. In this way they finished belonging to the body of professors of the school of Barcelona as tenured professors. Canosa taught Descriptive Geometry and Perspective. The English original by Fletcher would eventually stop being a manual with an only volume to become a monumental play in four volumes, with the ambitious project of duplicating the original content. For the English part they used the 1924 edition, that is, the seventh edition that since the former one in 1921, is the second one in which Fletcher signs the book alone, without the appearance of his father's name. Banister Fletcher (1833-1899) was his father and also a recognized architect. This new edition had been completely rewritten, according to Fletcher son, in the introduction of the 1921 edition, giving raise to a new and rejuvenated book. Emilio Canosa paid attention to this new edition and asked Calzada to submit Spanish architecture to the same analysis and method. Calzada did it with a great effort and will

although it would never have the graphic load of the English original, in spite of the great determination that the architect Josep Francesc Ràfols who was also professor of the Architecture School of Barcelona and also collaborator in this play, put on it. The first volume of Fletcher's play was published in 1928; it was reduced to the Ancient and Middle Ages and was followed by a second one called *Historia de la Arquitectura en España* (History of Architecture in Spain) that referred to the same period. After this there was the second part of the English architect that had a shorter and faster view, beginning in the Renaissance and finishing in the North American skyscraper, when it mentioned New York's Woolworth Building as "the most complete among those compositions". Unfortunately the fourth volume devoted to Spain again, was never published. It covered from the XVI to the XX century and had an appendix dealing with American colonial architecture, written by the architect Alberto Camacho, who worked as a professor in La Havana University by that time. That was a very complex volume without doubt, because that long period of architecture was sour grapes in the historic and graphic sense, in order to risk to make a synthesis than went further Juan Villanueva. That volume was never published, but it is sure that Calzada must have worked on it, and a proof of it is that Labor publishing house published his interesting *Historia de la arquitectura española* (Spanish Architecture History) (1933) in Barcelona, a few years later. In that book there is a jump from Villanueva's pupils until

Catalan modernism, devoting its last paragraphs to Gaudí. I have no doubt that it was the text ready for Canosa publishing house. Finally we have to add that the success of Fletcher-Calzada's play was really important, and although the play was incomplete, the edition was exhausted and asked for; there was the publication of a facsimile by Giner publishing house (1985). During the emblematic year 1929, when the Exhibition of Barcelona par excellence took place, many titles were published. Among them there were, *Manual de Carpintería de Armar* (Arming Carpentry Treaty), by C. Opitz; *Nuevo trazado de perspectiva para arquitectos* (The New Perspective Design for architects), by Reile, *Empleo del hierro en la construcción* (The Use of Iron in Construction), by Kersten; *Proyectos de mobiliario y decoración ingleses* (The Projects of English furniture and decoration) by P.H. Hildesley, with a preface written by the English architect Henri Percival Shapland; *Guía técnica del albañil contratista* (The Technical Guide of the bricklayer contactor), by J.J. Nieto that in his fourth edition went with *Tratado práctico de hormigón* (The Practical Teatry of Concrete) by S. Crivilles; the unknown and interesting *Estampas de Zurbarán* (Zurbarán illustrations), by Andrés Manuel Calzada and Luys Santa Marina; *La arquitectura del caserío vasco* (The Basque country house architecture), by Alfredo Baechslin, with an interesting preface by the architect from Bilbao Pedro Guimón and a very beautiful series of "completely unknown photographs"; and also the very early and complete book about *Gaudí*,

el gran arquitecto español (Gaudí, the great Spanish architect), with texts by the architects Josep F. Ràfols y Francisco Folguera.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this book started a new historic and graphic period in the analysis of Gaudí's work three years after his death, still keeping a half-living reality in the text and photographs, which will move away little by little, to become a simple document to be analysed and investigated by those who didn't know the master. A little time later it would be also a document for those who weren't even related to his closest collaborators' pupils. Canosa's *Gaudí* isn't really only an admirable work by Ràfols and Folguera about Gaudí, but it imposes itself as an objective, real and close testimony of the master, to which so many people made a contribution. This contribution goes from Ricardo Opisso's notes in the flesh, to the exceptional series of photographs proceeding mostly from Sagrada Família and Más' archives. But above all they proceeded from Canosa's fund that completed what the others didn't have and whose images have much importance nowadays due to the fact that many things have been lost and altered. Has anybody been interested in the Teresianas' corridors before? And what about Fernandez- Andrés de León's house, called Botines by the lay public? Is it necessary to remember Gaudí's desk, or the chair and the sofa of the "manager's sitting-room" from Casa Calvet? Our knowledge about Gaudí would be different if his memory and image hadn't intervened and lasted inside that book of bound covers, with golden iron. 1929 was, without doubt, the most prolific

year of the publishing house that already published some titles within the series called "Publicaciones de Arquitectura" (Architecture Publications). That means there was hard work during the previous years with some translations to German, where besides Emilio Canosa, also Bassegoda Musté took part. That work would be continued in 1930 by some plays like *Casas de campo españolas* (Spanish country houses) by Alfredo Baechlin, whose preface was written by the Argentinean architect Martín Noel; and also by the book *Mientras se alza el edificio* (While the building is raised), by the director of the magazine *Arquitectura y Construcción* (Architecture and Construction), from Barcelona by Don Manuel Vega and March. All those plays would deserve to be commented here because of their content as well as the edition character, but it is not possible to do it now although we want to remark the particular interest of each of them till becoming, in some cases, strange bibliophile books. The publishing house final punch was in 1931 when the play by Albrecht Haupt, *Palast-Architektur von Ober-Italien und Toscana von XIII bis XVIII Jahrhundert* [Italy and Tuscany Northern Palaces] was published in three imposing volumes, whose original edition in five volumes appeared for the first time in Berlin in 1908. Despite the fact that this reduction meant the sacrifice of some illustrations and changes on the original format, Canosa's edition put an essential play of architecture history within the reach of the Spanish reader, which didn't find translators nor editors in other

European and American countries. We end up with a play that I haven't had in my hands yet but I know it existed and was programmed to be published in 1933, because I could see it in old catalogues. I am referring to the book by César Martinell about *L'art català sota la unitat espanyola* (Catalan art under Spanish unity). Next year Emilio Canosa owned a chair in Madrid's Architecture School moving to this city and leaving his period in Barcelona and his short but intense publishing life behind. In the excellent library of Madrid's Architecture School, where Emilio Canosa would become director between 1941 and 1952, he, who loved books, architecture and photography so much, enjoyed dealing with the books of the military engineer don Juan C. Cebrian's generous and famous legacy, with which he enriched his funds between 1904 and 1917. Inside it, there was a very important German bibliographic component, where the first editions of the plays that Canosa had published in Barcelona, like the already mentioned written by Haupt, Sitte and other authors appear.

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